

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 1055

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GT, BH

SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN NEWSPAPER SERIES ON BELIZE

REF: GUATEMALA 0973

1. AS PART OF A SERIES OF REPORTS ON BELIZE, INDEPENDENT DAILY EL GRAFICO ON FEBRUARY 24 PUBLISHED AN INTERVIEW WITH PREMIER PRICE CONDUCTED IN BELMOPAN BY REPORTER RICARDO GATICA TREJO. ARTICLE QUOTED PRICE AS SAYING "INDEPENDENCE OF BELIZE WILL COME SOON AND WILL BE TOTAL." AT ANOTHER POINT, PRICE REPORTEDLY SAID THAT ALTHOUGH INDEPENDENCE HAS NOT BEEN "DOCUMENTED," BELIZE ALREADY IS INDEPENDENT DE FACTO. PRICE TOLD REPORTER HE HAD NO INFORMATION CONCERNING ANGLO-GUATEMALAN TALKS IN NEW YORK.

2. ASKED FOR HIS REACTION TO PRICE'S STATEMENTS, VICE FOREIGN MINISTER OBIOLS REITERATED TO EL GRAFICO GUATEMALAN POSITION THAT UNILATERAL DECLARATION OF BELIZEAN INDEPENDENCE WAS UNACCEPTABLE. OBIOLS ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT BELIZEAN INDEPENDENCE COULD BE CONSENTED TO (PUDIERA OTORGARSE), BUT ONLY BY MEANS OF AGREEMENTS SIGNED BY GOG AND APPROVED BY CONGRESS. OBIOLS SAID

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PRICE'S REMARKS WOULD HAVE NO EFFECT ON BRITISH-

GUATEMALAN TALKS.

3. IN ADDITION TO PRICE INTERVIEW, EL GRAFICO SERIES INCLUDED HIGHLY SPECULATIVE DESCRIPTION OF BELIZEAN MILITIA, CALLED THE "VOLUNTARY GUARD," WHICH THE REPORTER ESTIMATED AS NUMBERING 3-4,000. THE SAME ARTICLE ALSO DISCUSSED OTHER ASPECTS OF BELIZEAN DEFENSE, INCLUDING BRITISH GARRISON, BRITISH NAVAL PARTOLLING, MILITARY AIRCRAFT AND THE LOCAL POLICE FORCE. ANOTHER ARTICLE DESCRIBED DETAILS OF COURT PROCEEDINGS LEADING TO RELEASE OF FOUR GUATEMALAN CHICLE WORKERS ARRESTED FOR ILLEGALLY CROSSING THE BORDER (REFTEL).

4. ARTICLES HAVE BEEN ACCCOMPANIED BY EDITORIALS IN EL GRAFICO AND CO-OWNED LA TARDE WHICH DISCUSS BELIZEAN ISSUE IN REALISTIC TERMS NOT USUALLY HEARD HERE. LA TARDE ON FEBRUARY 24 COMMENTED THAT BELIZEAN POPULATION "HAS NO CONNECTION WITH OUR COUNTRY, NEITHER ETHNIC NOR CULTURAL, NOR OF ANY OTHER NATURE." THE EDITORIAL SUGGESTED GOG SHOULD HOLD PLEBISCITE TO DETERMINE ATTITUDE OF GUATEMALAN PEOPLE TOWARD BELIZE ISSUE. EL GRAFICO OF FEBRUARY 25 STATED BELIZEANS HAVE A RIGHT TO "THEIR OWN FORM OF GOVERNMENT", BUT BELIZE NEEDS TO INCORPORATE ITSELF INTO "LARGER POLITICAL-ECONOMIC UNIT," WHICH WOULD BE INTEGRATED CENTRAL AMERICA. THE EDITORIAL NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT IT WOULD BE UNREALISTIC TO THINK SUCH INCORPORATION COULD TAKE PLACE IN LESS THAN THE 25 YEARS WHICH PROPOSED CA TREATY PROJECTS FOR FORMATION OF CA ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL UNION.

5. COMMENT: THE "BELIZE SEASON" IS AN ANNUAL EVENT OF GUATEMALAN JOURNALISM, USUALLY OCCURRING WHEN OTHER NEWS IS SCARCE. IN COMPARISON WITH USUAL EMOTIONAL AND "JURIDICAL" APPROACH, EL GRAFICO STOOD OUT THIS YEAR WITH ITS NOVEL APPROACH OF ACTUALLY SENDING A JOURNALIST TO BELIZE. EL GRAFICO ARTICLES AND EDITORIALS SHOW AN APPRECIATION OF BELIZEAN REALITIES WHICH HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN ABSENT FROM GUATEMALAN TREATMENTS OF SUBJECT. REMARK ATTRIBUTED TO OBIOLS THAT INDEPENDENCE

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"COULD BE CONSENTED TO" IS ONE MORE PIECE OF EVIDENCE THAT GOG'S POSITION, WHILE PERHAPS STILL FAR FROM REALITY, IS COMING AROUND TO SOMETHING LESS THAN TOTAL ACQUISITION OF BELIZE. END COMMENT.

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